



FAVI officially inaugurates a work-training program

The center and headquarters of the Fundacion Arubano di esnan Visualmente Incapacita (FAVI) invited press and interested citizens for the ribbon cutting of their new computer room at their center in Primavera on Wednesday, November 20. "This is only the first phase in a complete training program," explained center director Mieke De Droog, "we plan to provide work training for the blind in all branches of employment."

Joining Mieke for the official opening was Esther Winklaar, director of Pro Bista Corsow, the organization that works with the blind on Aruba's neighbor island, and Henk Snetselaar of Holland. Mr. Snetselaar is a specialist in training the blind and visually impaired in the use of computers and the special software that assists them. He assisted in setting up the new computer room at the Primavera center and training FAVI personnel to work with the equipment and in instructing their clients in their use. The room contains four special desktop readers, a number of hand held readers, four computers and six workstations. The readers enlarge printed material, facilitating the visually impaired in reading instruction manuals and newspapers. The computers contain special software that puts a "lens" wherever the user chooses, enabling the visually impaired to see the images on the screen.

Gino Wever, who recently acquired his law degree at the University of Aruba, demonstrated software that verbalizes what is written in Microsoft Word, allowing the fully blind to scan and "read" documents, as well as what is contained in a new document being heard as it is written.

Mieke de Droog explained that the equipment is proving invaluable in assisting visually impaired youth to complete their course of studies Aruba's only high school along with sighted students. Sammy Hamawi, who assisted by his mother Sumaira cut the ribbon on the new facility is such a student, looking to finish and get his degree soon and go on to university. He agrees that the equipment provided by FAVI has enabled him and other students to do so.

Esther Winklaar was invited to say a few words at the opening and related her history of being involved with job training for the blind. Mieke explained that Pro Bista and FAVI are working together to make more complete facilities to assist the visually impaired of each island. Sharing information on their various forms of expertise is helping both Aruba and Curacao to offer more compete and better programs and equipment for their clients. Aruba is more advanced in working with visually impaired children and recently opened a special "Children's Room," whereas Curacao has greater expertise in job training. The island of Bonaire is also benefiting from this partnership, and they all are receiving assistance from experts in Holland such as Henk Snetselaar.

"The program is not only about the actual training," asserts Mieke, "the most important element is *empowerment*. Giving the visually impaired the opportunity and counseling that will make them realize they can lead normal, productive lives like everyone else." She offered particular thanks to their sponsors in this project; the Samenwerkende Fondsen Nederlandse Antillen, Caribbean Accounting & Tax Consultants, N.V. and the Quota Club International of Aruba.

The comfortably equipped computer room is also proving invaluable to not only those that are looking towards their work future, but offers internet services and a way for blind retirees to remain stimulated, educated and to communicate with the world around them. The new facility demonstrates how the staff of the relatively new center in Primavera are progressing in providing complete services for the all the visually impaired of Aruba, no matter their age or situation. All services are offered free, and the center survives on donations. Any that are interested in sponsoring the center or have need of their services can contact them at telephone 582-5222 or 582-5051.